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ABSTRACT

In response to an article appearing in "The New York Times Magazine" by Anne Roiphe titled "The Trouble at Sarah Lawrence", which alleges "that the open visibility of female homosexuals in the student body, nourished by Sarah Lawrence's Women Studies Program, has led the prestigious college to ruin", this paper questions whether women's studies or ethnic studies departments in colleges and universities attract and encourage radicalism and, as some have maintained, tolerate only radicalism. The paper proceeds to describe the Mexican American movement and the various stages of awareness that the Mexican American experiences (the stages of resistance, acculturation or assimilation, counter-acculturation, and the idealized state of "beyond culture"). These various stages are compared to the process in the Women's Movement. The paper contends that all minority groups within the same social circumstances of oppression employ similar dynamics of change. However, it grants that it is more difficult to isolate the various stages in the historical experience of women because sexism is the most primitive form of oppression. It cautions against stifling the radical side of a mass movement. It is analyzed that the political lesbian and radical take their activism just one step further in attacking their ascribed roles in society. Chicano and feminist become synonymous in this analysis, and the political activist and political lesbian the further expression of each. (Author/NQ)

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BEYOND FEMINISM AND THE DYNAMICS OF MASS MOVEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a response to an article which appeared in the The New York Times Magazine by Anne Rolphe titled, "The Trouble at Sarah Lawrence". The Rolphe article alleges that the open visibility of female homosexuals in the student body, nourished by Sarah Lawrence's Women Studies Program, has led the prestigious college to ruin.

This author addresses herself to the question of whether Womens Studies or Ethnic Studies Departments in Colleges and Universities attracts and encourages radicalism and as some have maintained, tolerates only radicalism. The paper proceeds to describe the various stages the Mexican American goes through in his/her pursuit of self determination and compares these stages to the process in the Women's Movement. It is the author's contention that all minority groups within the same social circumstances of oppression employ similar dynamics of change.

A description is given of the Mexican American movement and the various stages of awareness that the Mexican American experiences including the stages of resistance, acculturation or assimilation, counter-acculturation and the idealized state of "beyond culture." The author grants that it is more difficult to isolate these stages in the historical experience of women because sexism is the most primitive form of oppression. However, once American women made a conscious decision for awareness and change, the dynamics of mass movements were set into motion and American women experienced similar stages as that of the Mexican American.

Gonzales cautions against stifling the radical side of a mass movement. It is her analysis that the political lesbian and radical take their activism just one step further in attacking their ascribed roles in society. Chicano and feminist become synonomous in this analysis, and the political activist and political lesbian the further expression of each.

BEYOND FEMINISM AND THE DYNAMICS OF MASS MOVEMENTS

The New York Times Magazine in early 1977 published an article by Anne Roiphe entitled, "The Trouble at Sarah Lawrence." In this article, Ms. Roiphe alleges that the open visibility of female homosexuals in the student body, nourished and fed by Sarah Lawrence's Womens Studies Program, has led the prestigious college to ruin.

In the current climate of accusations of reverse discrimination, similarly vicious attacks on ethnic studies programs have been leveled. Critics have raised questions about the role of minority groups in social change. These questions need to be addressed in order to shed light on the dynamics of mass movements. For example, were policies of reverse discrimination and racial polarization advocated by the most radical elements of ethnic studies departments? Are all feminists in search of self-awareness within the "safe" company of other woman homosexuals? And finally, are ethnic studies and women's studies breeding grounds for radicals? It is my intent to draw comparisons between the Chicano movement and the Women's movement. As a minority woman, educator and active participant in both movements, I would like to propose that the process is the same for all groups which find themselves within a similar social context as that of women and minorities in the United States. The process of awareness that led to the establishment of ethnic studies and women's studies programs is a process inherent to humankind in their pursuit of self-determination.

From the perspective of disadvantaged minority actively involved in a civil rights movement for a number of years, my reaction to reading Roiphe's article can be characterized in several ways. On the lighter side, I can seek a certain consolation in seeing that even the most economically privileged in our society meet their day of reckoning, Roiphe's article. In this respect, I could smile with satisfaction and ignore the whole thing. On the more serious side, however, I would be untrue to my own intellectual growth and understanding, nurtured by many years of adversity, if I did not respond to the underlying societal attitudes at play in her article.

In the 60's I was a Chicana activist working for a community which has gained, however slight, some semblance of power. Today in the 70's, moving into the 80's, I have mellowed into the academic trying to understand my own activism and the dynamics of mass movements. From my particular vantage point, then, I refute Roiphe's innocent analysis of the Sarah Lawrence "crisis".

The conservative backlash has caught up with the women's movement to the point of declaring open warfare. Like other minority movements, feminists will be subjected to the anti-thesis of their thesis, that of equal rights for women, for several years to come. With the same naivete of the instructed elite, Roiphe attempts to analyze the situation at Sarah Lawrence in the most limited societal definitions. She defines her subject as simple divisions of heterosexual and homosexual, and implications of each to the well-being of society, and especially, Sarah Lawrence. She shows no understanding of mass movements, just as anthropologists and sociologists had little understanding of the civil rights movements of the 60's, and the communities which spawned them.

This backlash, for the first time in historical experience, has enabled minorities and a majority group to focus on their shared social context. And this context clearly isolates the forces of oppression experienced by each within the white male. Such a clear identification affords the historical precedent for alliances never before imagined.

Political potential aside, the key to mass movements is the search for identity and self-actualization within an atmosphere of denial of the natural forces of determinism. The Black movement, Chicano movement, Asian-american, Native american and Women's movements all followed similar evolutionary patterns with individual variations depending on the peculiar characteristics of the group. Most significantly, each group recognized that economic and political power is essential for self-actualization. But in order to attain this power, it was necessary to do everything according to the norms of society at the expense of sacrificing group identity. It is important to point out

that loss of identity does not necessarily mean loss of culture and language as so many proponents of bilingual bicultural education would have us believe. It is expected that an immigrant to the United States would experience some fall-out to his/her act. The same can be said for a conquered group. Adopting the culture and language of a new nationality in itself is not traumatic. Instead, the group's negative self-concept emerges as a result of prejudice, discrimination and inferior social status. Loss of identity actually means loss of positive self-perception simply by virtue of belonging to a specific group. This negative identity or negative self concept and its resultant insecure behavior creates a self-fulfilling cycle of fear of failure, to a reluctance to try to improve status, to continued inferior status. So if the group finds that after sacrificing their identity and conforming to society's norms for that group, they still are not a part of the decision-making processes of society, they will react, and a mass movement is set into motion.

There are several distinct stages in a people's search for self-actualization. As briefly as possible, I will describe the stages the group experiences. The Mexican American people represent the best group for studying these progressive stages because the levels of expression are a constant in this community. Other minority groups do not necessarily provide this readily observable constant of progressive stages. As an illustration of the intricacies of the stages and their implications, I would like to point out that each Hispanic minority is distinct andfor this reason uniting this community in the United States is no easy task. They are distinct in that each group finds themselves at a different level of awareness, and thus, oftentimes does not compliment the level of awareness or needs of another Hispanic brother or sister. The Puerto Ricans', unique political status as a commonwealth of the United States complicates their ability to incorporate their consciousness into that of the total Hispanic group. The Cuban's migration to the United States occurred spontaneously and within a decade. Their consciousness may not reach complementation with Chicanos or Puerto Ricans until a second generation has been raised according to "the American Plan".

In the case of the Mexican American, an understanding of the stages can provide us with a positive approach to acculturation as well as prevent us from endorsing the destructive effects of forced assimilation. It is not a matter of the Mexican coming to the United States, experiencing the forces of assimilation, and reacting, It is an on-going process where the stages are ever present expressing themselves as different stages of awareness. This is so because of this country's proximity to Mexico and the deluge of Mexican laborers seeking work on this side of the border.

The first stage in this process is that of resistance. Resistance is not new to anthropologists. Bastide described it in Applied Anthropology as when an individual leaves a cultural environment which has been positively reinforced and is suddenly faced with the prospect of assimilation in a new environment. This is a simplification of Bastide's worthy and lengthy analysis of cultural resistance but it should suffice to introduce the concept. In the United States, assimilation has not only been a prospect, but the only alternative.

When the Mexican national comes to the United States, his personal identity is still intact. However miserly may be the work which brings him to this country, psychologically he is able to resist the many racist practices he encounters. He knows who and what he is; he is a Mexican. Psychological identity clearly defined, he resists the assimilative forces of the United States society in favor of maintaining his own culture, language; his identity.

However, in this country where the historical mandate has been one of assimilation, the burden placed on the second generation Mexican is much greater. Negative reinforcement of this group's cultural characteristics has caused tremendous pressure on the Chicano to assimilate. The primary vehicle for accomplishing this has been the American public school system. Chicanos were spanked, fined and harshly discriminated against for speaking Spanish on school grounds. The negative identification with Spanish and the Mexican culture

paved the way for a negative self-concept and finally little academic success. The educational system as well as other social institutions seek to perpetuate the status quo and enforce the laws of society made by, and for the benefit of, the powerful. The Catholic Church has done no less in demanding submission from its Chicano devotees for an afterlife with God, than the public school system has done in promoting education and conformity with the "ideal American" as the key to success.

Chicanos went to World War II with every thought of using the military as an instrument of assimilation. There were more Mexican Americans who won medals of honor proportionate to their representation in the population, than any other group in the country. Yet, when they returned to their dusty South Texas towns, they could not find jobs, and they still experienced the same abusinve discrimination of the past. This scene was to be repeated throughout the Chicano communities of the Southwest. They had denied their parents, their culture, their roots. Some had changed their names to a more anglocized version. And the Mexican American male, in particular, sought to woo and win Anglo females as a step toward upward mobility and acceptance. The Chicana woman perpetuated the myth and watched her male counterpart and the world pass her by.

However, at the height of the Chicano movement, Chicanas in particular, witnessed the Anglo wife become the indifferent spectator to the Chicano activist getting "in touch" with his heritage. Chicano men were careful not to include their calling card to assimilation in their revolutionary activities. In many instances, that stage of the Chicano experience led to the separation of many mixed couples to the detriment of children and the positive goals of acculuration, the healthy expression of two cultures. The Anglo female was the innocent victim of the third stage of the group's move towards self-actualization, the counter-acculturation stage. She, at the time, was not conscious enough of her own oppressive status to initiate a movement of her own. She was sufficiently conscious of the lack of communication between her and the Anglo male that it eventually led her to minority males.

Two stages in the Mexican American experience have been described. The first stage is that of resistance. The second stage normally follows a process of assimilation or acculturation depending on the dominant group. The third stage results from the recognition by the group that they have made personal sacrifices inherent to the self-determination of the individual and have not truly been integrated into society. By integration it is important to define this as participating in the decision-making processes of a nation. If the decision-making process is defined as legislating and recommending the goals of society, then we must look at the current structure of Congress and Chicano representation in the Federal Administration. There are currently six Hispanics in Congress, four of which are Mexican American. There are no Hispanic cabinet officers. There are five Mexican Americans at the Assistant Secretary level. There are an unprecedented number of Hispanics at the sub-cabinet level, but these are entrusted more with program implementation rather than policy-making.

The record for women is better, but not much. And looking at the individuals appointed, we must take into account whether the women involved sympathize with the goals of self-actualization or whether they are politically "safe" avoiders of the feminist label. Neither group, women or Mexican Americans have representation in the most important policy-making body of the nation, the U. S. Senate.

It could be argued that the Hispanic population is responsible for their lack of elected officials. Certainly a community that is projected to be the largest minority group in the country by 1980 should determine its own political future. Such reasoning, however, negates the devastating impact of forced assimilation and socialization on an ethnically and culturally different group; a group that has been considered inferior in both respects and thus, is the victim of discrimination. And most important is the fact that this group is linked to the United States in a dependency situation that no other group encounters. The United States provides the only viable escape valve for a depressed Mexican job market. So while thousands of Mexicans cross the border annually seeking work, their proximity to Mexico allows a sustained identification with

that nation especially as a defense to the psychological stress of prejudice and discrimination.

Organized groups of people have structured themselves around designated roles. At the most primitive level we find the division of labor between men and women. On a more complex level we find certain groups occupying the role of lowest contributor to society's goals while highest contributor to the least desirable labor. In either case, whether women or a class-discriminated group, the negative effects are the same.

These roles are usually based on some economic formula. Women have been given the societal role of providing for the male, to alleviate him of the everyday maintenance chores, allowing him greater freedom and flexibility to plan the destiny of humankind. Likewise, the Mexican has provided the field labor ' all the major agricultural areas of this country and although occupying in greater numbers the lowest paying job category in the labor market, the Chicano has made less progress in obtaining equal opportunity than any other group. Economically, how much can ~~the~~ white male afford in equal rights. And economics and power are at the core of oppressive societies.

It goes beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the history of discrimination against women and their lower-class status. Traditionally women have only been allowed two options for economic support, prostitution or submissive wife. In The Dark Angel: Aspects of Victorian Sexuality by Fraser Harrison, we are rendered a description of female status in only one period of our history, albeit a darker period. Harrison writes that prostitution was the only way out of misery open to poor women. Whereas respectable women were a race apart, fettered by inactivity, presumed ill-health and ignorance according to Harrison. This was the submissive, witless woman of mid-century.

It is more difficult to isolate the stages of awareness for women because the female condition is a universal condition and earliest example of class differentiation. But the components are all there; the loss of identification, periodic attempts at resistance, and finally, counter-acculturation that

leads to a mass movement towards self-actualization.

Chicanos reacted to a lack of societal participation with a movement in the late 60's. This stage of the process towards self-actualization is referred to in anthropological terms as the "counter-acculturation" stage. Counter-acculturation is a second form of resistance. Counter-acculturation then, is defined as a response to group attempts to conform to society at the expense of it's identity and still not being incorporated into the decision-making processes of that society. This new form of resistance is characterized by certain forms of group behavior. Most prominent among them, is the attempt to return to nativism. In contemporary terms, it has taken the form of searching for roots. Another characteristic is the emergence of so-called prophets. In the case of the civil rights movement, groups sought The Leader. The leader in this sense acted more as a prophet than just a political leader. They carried the message to the people and the faith of the group rested upon the supernatural and charismatic energies of "the leader".

The Chicano sacrificed his culture and language but has never really been accepted into the power structure. The bilingual bicultural movement was one vehicle for the Chicano to return to nativism, which makes it so hard for Anglo politicians and academicians to accept or understand its program design or goals. The Chicano movement generation questioned the reality of their culture and the proficiency of their native language; all of which would not have occurred if the group had truely been integrated. Leaders emerged. These were the prophets of knowledge; those that articulated the status of the Chicano in terms of negative identity and oppression, educational and economic discrimination and all the other most severe social ills. Assimilation became a bad word; political power a goal.

The search for roots in the women's movement is best typified in the popularity of mythology and women. Evelyn Gould Davis' <u>The First Sex</u> is the most notable example of a return to nativism. Once again, in the case of women, we are dealing with a condition that has existed since the human race has existed. Therefore, the return to nativism

would appropriately search out that period of history when women appeared superior. Oftentimes, this led to questionable scholarship; theses strained with idealism as in the case of Gould Davis. Likewise, the Chicanos praised their Indian heritage without sufficiently investigating the oppressive nature of Monteczuma's reign. The Aztec empire was idealized beyond reality and historical fact.

Within this context of counter-acculturation, the acceptance of the term Chicano and all that it implies, is an identification with the self-actualization movement of the Chicano. In order to reach this self-actualization it was necessary to rediscover Chicano roots. Most important, Chicanismo is a commitment to self-actualization just as the term feminism is a commitment by women to self-actualization. And it is at this stage that self-discovery and inter-group discovery takes place.

Two very important aspects surface at this point. One is the release of the tension and hostility created by an oppressive society. Compare this to a bell curve where the group's radicalism must peak in order to level off. The homosexuality described by Roiphe at Sarah Lawrence can be equated with the most radical elements of the Chicano movement. The political lesbian, just as the Chicano activist, carries her activism just one step further in attacking her assigned roles in society. Chicano and feminist become synonomous; the further expression of each is activist and lesbian. Certain individuals, because of a variety of reasons, require more pronounced statements of release. Activist or not, without the release, it is difficult for those who identify themselves as oppressed to stabilize to a point of tolerance and understanding. The release manifests itself as anger with the oppressor followed by a time of isolation from the oppressor in order to discover group identity. By knowing the group, the individual comes to know himself/herself better. It is in the mutual discovery that individuals come to terms with themselves in a non-threatening environment. For the Chicano, Chicano Studies provided the above. For the female, Women's Studies was the obvious direction. There is little difference between the isolationism of ethnic studies departments, "while they get their heads together", and the

isolationism of the Women's Studies Department at Sarah Lawrence or anywhere else.

What makes the crisis at Sarah Lawrence a crisis, is that it deals with the most primitive level of roles. That in turn, places the isolation of women in the uncomfortable realm of sexual isolation. This is particularly uncomfortable within a society that has always burdened itself with the most puritanical definitions of sex. In addition, society has reached a level of confrontation with oppression thatit finds itself challenging its most elementary form, the superiority of one sex over another. According to anthropological analysis, the important thing to keep in mind about counter-acculturation is that it is as natural to humankind, within a context of oppression, as is humankind's search for self-actualization.

The natural experience of growth will take the Chicano beyond the counter-acculturation stage. It is this writer's hope that the next stage will be that of "beyond culture". This stage is defined as the point where the Chicano can function at a level created by his bilingual bicultural heritage as an individual no longer cognizant of personal definition in terms of culture and language, but in terms of a world community comprised of many cultures and languages. At this point, the individual no longer is a prisoner of culture and language, but only uses them as instruments for personal and group freedom. The Chicano must grow in this direction. But in order to create this universal society of understanding, the majority culture must also grow "beyond culture".

The Women's Movement must also move beyond the counter-acculturation stage. When women reach an understanding with men and men are more willing to share power, together they will construct a better society for everyone. Then women will move "beyond feminism". Hopefully, this will not necessarily mean a return to conventional definitions of the sexes excluding alternative lifestyles, but it will alleviate the transitional stage of political lesbianism.

Critical to this is the recognition that release is healthy. It must take place. The important thing to keep in mind in the dynamics described, is that if oppression dominates and suppresses the release, the move beyond will be in jeopardy. This would

set back the maturation of society as a healthy state of awareness for both men and women, minorities and majorities, to the earlier stages of counter-acculturation. The only expression left to a second confrontation with counter-acculturation is destructive, physical rather than spiritual revolution.